

Benton County Council

March 23rd, 2023

The Benton County Council met at 8:30 a.m. at the Benton County Courthouse. Those in attendance were Council members: Jim Schoen, Angie Glotzbach, Mike Conner, Brent Cox, Jack Duncan, Jackie Steinmetz, Katrina Schutter and Auditor, Audrey Freeland

Others in attendance were – John Cox and Bryan Berry

Business:

The meeting minutes from February 23, 2023, meeting was approved as presented with a motion by Councilman, Jack Duncan, seconded by Councilwoman, Angie Glotzbach and motion carried.

Auditor Freeland stated that the sheriff is still struggling to fill the vacant CO positions. She went on to say that he discussed the possibility of having a jailer who left employment to go to another county come back on his days off and work in a part time capacity. Councilman Cox asked if there was money in the budget that he would be transferring. Auditor Freeland said that the sheriff talked about moving money from the two unfilled CO account lines if the two boards approved his request.

Auditor Freeland informed the board that the sheriff did hold a testing day for a new merit deputy, he is hoping those not selected might be interested in a correction officer position. Councilwoman Glotzbach asked if he is down only 1 position, yes for now. She added that the Commissioners have discussed (not yet approved) the new position. Councilman Conner asked if all departments follow this process, yes, they do. Councilman Conner wanted to clarify that the Council is only approving the funding not the actual positions. Auditor Freeland stated that is correct, the board of commissioners approve/deny the positions. Auditor Freeland said that part of the reason why he is looking at the part time is because of his current staff getting burnt out covering the shifts.

Councilman Schoen asked how the meeting went on Friday. Councilman Cox said that they approved with some contingency, and that right now it is all verbal for the next two years.

John Cox - Sheriff

- Mental Health/Drug Addiction – there is a free program for this, and John is meeting with Prosecutor, Probation and the Judge to discuss it further. Judge Wright has been told by the IN Supreme Court that all Judges are to hold a meeting with all of them to talk about what is or can be done within the jail. It is called a Q360 program run by a therapist. Sheriff Cox said that 60-70% of the inmate suffer from some type of mental illness. Councilwoman Steinmetz asked if the sessions were virtual or in person. Sheriff Cox said that they will be done both ways. He said he will continue to keep them up to date as he learns more about it
- Commissary funds – all the basic needs are covered but they will be adding some additional items that they will be offering. Some items will be additional blankets or mattresses that they will be able to purchase. Hopefully it will not only improve the behavior of the inmates, but it will provide additional revenues so that he can continue to outfit the corrections officers as needed. To date his \$7,0000 uniform budget has been depleted. They are looking for items with the commissary provider to possibly get tablets which will eliminate books to the general population that have in the past been mistreated and flushed. It will be locked but provide the option for additional purchases jail approved items.
- Chirp charging – Making some changes. Sheriff Cox spoke about the daily routines and changes he has implemented since he is short two correction officers and to ensure the safety of his staff.

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- Jail – the jail is the cleanest it has ever been. They are utilizing the part time custodial staff to assist with this and have added Cintas to deliver those cleaning items
- HVAC units – working through the 9 furnaces units to see what needs to be repaired/replaced. Brouillette's is out and updating those and working with Sheriff Cox on the 3-year plan he hopes to present during the May meetings.
- Thermostats – these are also being updated and changing those out since they were outdated and not working properly.
- Rockin-Dirt – Excavation and water remediation to stop the water from coming through the blocks and walls. He will send back an estimate that Sheriff Cox will share once he receives it.
- Masonry – has a contractor coming on-site today to provide an estimate as well. There will need to be some brick replacement, especially by the North door that is being replaced.
- Roof – Smart Roofing was able to stop the leaks and they informed Sheriff Cox that they do not feel that there are enough drains cut and more need to be added
- Equipment issues – 60% of the departments tasers are not working properly. All of them need to be replaced because they are well past their end of life. He has to be able to provide a non-lethal approach.
- Ordinance – Commissioner granted a donation fund ordinance and that is where he will place any donations received to also offset those costs.
- Grants – ballistic vest grant / all deputies are now outfitted and he is ordering stab resistant for the correction officers. Body worn video grant/ \$12,600 awarded and will be for deputies and correction officers as well. Applied for a BC Foundation grant / \$20,000 applied for. He has also been awarded \$2,200 from the Coalition for the anonymous We Tip Hotline. This hotline will be sent directly to the Sheriff, and he will distribute it out.
- Vehicles – The 1st vehicle is in Chicago and should be here by the end of the month and will be a K9 truck for Deputy Fuehrer and K9-Lux. The second vehicle should be here by May and that will be given to Deputy Deno.
- Training – Sheriff Cox will be working on getting all of the deputies and the correction officers. They will be training on defensive tactical training. This will begin in April.
- Out of office – Sheriff Cox wanted to let the Council know that he will be out of the office and let them know who would be in charge in his absence.
- Staffing concerns – Sheriff Cox said that he will be leaning on the board to see what can be done to raise the correction officer's salary because he is unable to get anyone to apply due to the salary/risks. He must maintain a certain number of officers and has a couple who have begun the conversation of retiring.
- Youth leadership camp – June 1st at Pine Creek Camp and the department is very excited to be involved and be supported. The camp is available to 7th and 8th grade students

Sheriff Cox asked the Council what he could do for them. Councilman Schoen thanked the Sheriff for the updates.

- Fairgrounds – the county highway did a great job with clean up. They will be getting some concrete donated by IMI to fix the approach at a couple of the barns.
 - Track – they will be reopening the track for races and family events
 - Electric – Houston electric has offered to donate their time and materials to redo all the track lighting. The fair board will make sure that they have some type of display of their company.
 - 2023 Fair – they will have a band "The Flying Toasters", the queen show, fish fry, mechanical bull, bounce houses, car show and antique tractor show just to name a few of the highlights.
 - Every 15 Minutes (E15M) – the department will be participating in this important program
- The board thanked him for the updates & everything he has been doing & told him to enjoy his vacation.

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Commissioner Berry informed the board that they did get a verbal commitment from BP for another community investment of some kind for 2024 & 2025. Councilman Conner asked if the next two payments will be the same amount as the one received for 2023. Commissioner Berry said it might be a little more but that will depend.

Councilman Cox asked where they are on the repower project BP is requesting. They signed a repower agreement on Tuesday with them as well.

Councilwoman Glotzbach asked if those funds can be utilized for the 2024 budget, yes it can be used. Councilman Schoen said that they are not sure exactly how it will affect the tax rates just yet. Commissioner Berry said he is working with the legislators, but they will probably have to make it a megawatt tax and eliminate the assessment on all renewables, so the county can control it not the state. They are going to do a summer study on it this summer. He is working with Alan Adwell are working together to put something together. They are working on how abatements would work. Councilman Schoen asked what protection we have with the other wind companies. Commissioner Berry replied that is what he asked them to add to their EDA's so they would still pay the same amount.

Commissioner Berry said since we are the first ones in Indiana to have wind farms it was unknown, there are probably a few more things they can use to their advantage. Councilwoman Steinmetz asked if the county would get anything with the improvements they are doing now, yes but not until 2025 replied Commissioner Berry. Councilwoman Steinmetz then asked about the roads since they are back now for the project. Commissioner Berry said that a road use, somewhat of a drainage plan and a new decommissioning plan were signed Tuesday and they have to pay permit fees. Councilwoman Steinmetz asked if they could back to where they own the easement and retax them on that. Commissioner Berry said that the county could do that but on real property they can stop you each year by taking it to court so they decided not to do that. Councilman Schoen said that he feels they are going to work among themselves after those first ten years are up and sell it for pennies on the dollar and that is what the county has to try and prevent. Commissioner Berry said that there is legislation in place now stopping that (HB1401) saying that any renewable sales that the assess value stays the same moving forward, but it is not retroactive.


With no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m. with a motion by Councilman, Brent Cox, second by Councilman, Jack Duncan, motion carried.



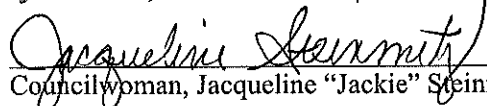
President, James "Jim" Schoen



Councilman, Mike Conner



Councilman, John "Jack" Duncan



Councilwoman, Jacqueline "Jackie" Steinmetz

Attest: 

Audrey Freeland, County Auditor

Vice President, Brent Cox



Councilwoman, Angie Glotzbach



Councilwoman, Katrina "Trina" Schutter